

John Manor

From: Corey Woodby on behalf of Senate Majority Committee Clerks
Sent: Wednesday, April 20, 2016 1:20 PM
To: John Manor
Subject: FW: Testimony in support of Truancy Bills
Attachments: VAMM-SACvoladmid-miflyer.docx

FYI

Corey Woodby
Senate Majority Committee Clerk
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From: stacy hickox [mailto:stacyhickox@hotmail.com]
Sent: Wednesday, April 20, 2016 12:53 PM
To: Senate Majority Committee Clerks <OfcSMCC@senate.michigan.gov>
Subject: Testimony in support of Truancy Bills

I was present but did not have an opportunity to testify at last week's hearing on the proposed truancy bills. Unfortunately I cannot attend today's hearing but I would like to offer support for the bills on behalf of the Student Advocacy Center's Volunteer Advocates of Mid-Michigan (VAMM). I am attaching an explanation of our organization for your reference. In brief, we represent students who are facing suspension or expulsion from mid-Michigan area schools. We believe in 3 primary principles related to this issue:

- 1) students should participate in a fair and inclusive process prior to receiving a suspension or expulsion
- 2) schools should have the discretion to determine whether a suspension or expulsion is warranted, while refraining from exercising that discretion to the disproportionate detriment of student of color or with disabilities
- 3) schools should be encouraged and receive the resources to implement restorative practices and appropriate supports and services for students with disabilities so as to reduce the use of suspension and expulsion.

We are encouraged by the attention to schools' responses to truancy, since the worst response to a truant child is to continue to remove that child from school through a suspension or expulsion. VAMM would encourage this committee to go beyond this attention to truancy to ensure that students are afforded a meaningful opportunity to be heard prior to the implementation of a suspension or expulsion, and to revise the mandatory punishments included in Michigan's so called zero tolerance statute.

I look forward to future attention and legislative changes to address these issues.

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Student Advocacy Center's Volunteer Advocates of Mid-Michigan

A collaboration between the Student Advocacy Center of Michigan and the School-to-Prison Pipeline Committee of the Lansing Area ACLU

Facing school discipline or Other Questions?

Call: The Student Advocacy Center at
(734) 482-0489

Or

Email:
contact@studentadvocacycenter.org

The Student Advocacy Center of Michigan (SAC) works to assist our most vulnerable students stay in school, realize their rights to a quality public education, and experience success. SAC's services include education advocacy and support, education mentoring (Check and Connect), youth voice, and family support. SAC has a special focus on school discipline, students in foster care or experiencing homelessness, and students with mental illness or other disabilities. Every day SAC fights what is often called the "school-to-prison pipeline." SAC believes public education is a human

right and necessary for a thriving democracy. SAC believes all students — students in poverty, students of color, students with mental illness, students with disabilities, students with no stable living situation — deserve a quality public education and that educators deserve the resources, respect and support to make that happen.

"Zero-tolerance" policies criminalize minor infractions of school rules, while high-stakes testing programs encourage educators to push out low-performing students to improve their schools' overall test scores. Students of color are especially vulnerable to push-out trends and the discriminatory application of discipline.

Michigan schools suspend too many students. Our state's zero tolerance policies are much broader than federal law requires, despite the lack of evidence that zero tolerance policies improve school safety or student behavior. As the President of Michigan's Department of Education explained in a recent memorandum to school districts, "the overuse of suspensions and expulsions may actually increase the likelihood of later criminal misconduct."

Nationally, black students are suspended and expelled at a rate 3 times greater than white students, and

students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be suspended as students without disabilities.¹ Similarly, Michigan schools suspended 26% of black students compared to 8% of white students, and 16% of students with disabilities, compared to 8% of students without disabilities, in 2011-12.² As the U.S. Department of Justice and Department of Education explained in recent federal guidance to school districts, “racial discrimination in school discipline is a real problem.”

Once suspended or expelled, students are less likely to graduate and more likely to spend time in prison. Unfortunately, most Michigan students do not have advocates at disciplinary hearings.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Volunteer Advocates of Mid-Michigan is to protect the rights of students in mid-Michigan. We recruit and train volunteer advocates to represent mid-Michigan public school students in suspension and expulsion hearings. We also organize and promote activities designed to challenge institutional threats to educational opportunities for low income children.

We hope to recruit volunteer social work advocates from Michigan State University School of Social Work and Cooley Law School to form interdisciplinary teams and provide holistic services. In addition to zealous representation at hearings, volunteer advocates will attempt to connect students with community support networks which will help students remain in school and progress toward graduation.

Need Help with a School Discipline Issue?

The Volunteer Advocates of Mid-Michigan will provide advocate representation for youth whose cases are referred for a suspension or expulsion hearing. We will attempt ensure that mid-Michigan students referred for a hearing have access to quality representation at one of the most challenging moments in their lives.

If you have questions, need representation in a school hearing or have been notified of a pending suspension/expulsion hearing at school please contact the Student Advocacy Center of Michigan for a free consultation at **(313)596-9805**, or email **contact@studentadvocacycenter.org**.

Note: Some VAMM advocates are lawyers and licensed social workers, but some advocates are law students, social work students, professionals, and volunteers from social organizations in mid-Michigan who are trained as advocates to represent students and their families at school hearings. Advocates do not provide legal advice. Student advocates will not be directly supervised by their educational institutions.

¹ See U.S. Dept. of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection (March 2014), <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crd-c-discipline-snapshot.pdf>

² *Id.* at 12, 16.